

Message Text

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ORIGIN SS-30

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O 190051Z DEC 73 ZFF4
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY MADRID IMMEDIATE
USINT CAIRO
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
USMISSION GENEVA
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

S E C R E T STATE 246932

EXDIS, TOSEC 299 ZFF-MADRID ONLY

E.O.11652: XGDS-3

TAGS: PFOR, XF

SUBJECT: INR ASSESSMENT OF LIKELIHOOD OF EARLY
RESUMPTION OF ARAB-ISRAELI HOSTILITIES

1. SUMMARY. IF SARG CONFIRMS REPORT FROM QUASI-OFFICIAL SYRIAN ARAB NEWS AGENCY THAT IT HAS DECIDED NOT TO PARTICIPATE IN GENEVA CONFERENCE, WE BELIEVE THAT THERE WILL BE MUCH BETTER THAN EVEN CHANCE OF EARLY SYRIAN RESUMPTION OF HOSTILITIES, FOR WHICH DAMASCUS IS NOW VERY EXTENSIVELY PREPARED. SYRIAN AIM WOULD BE MAINLY POLITICAL, VIZ, TO FORCE ISRAEL TO ENTER PEACE CONFERENCE UNDER LESS FAVORABLE TERMS THAN NOW ARRANGED, BUT FIGHTING WOULD ALSO PLEASE SYRIAN HAWKS AND EASE
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ASAD'S DOMESTIC STRAINS. IF SYRIA, RESUMED, WE BELIEVE EGYPT WOULD BE DRAWN IN ALMOST IMMEDIATELY. SOVIETS WOULD BE UNLIKELY TO WARN-DAMASCUS BEFOREHAND THAT THEY WOULD NOT AID SYRIA IN THE EVENT THAT THE RESUMED

HOSTILITIES WENT BADLY; AND, EVEN IF SOVIETS SO WARNED, SYRIANS WOULD PROBABLY NOT CONSIDER SUCH A THREAT CREDIBLE. END SUMMARY.

2. AS WE ASSESS SYRIAN SITUATION, REGIME IS SUSPICIOUS THAT CEASEFIRE AND GENEVA CONFERENCE UNDER PRESENT ARRANGEMENTS AND AGENDA ARE ELEMENTS OF AN AMERICAN-ISRAELI MANEUVER TO FRUSTRATE ARAB EFFORT TO REGAIN OCCUPIED TERRITORIES, AND THAT UNILATERAL EGYPTIAN

ACCEPTANCE OF CEASEFIRE, EXCHANGE OF POWS WITHOUT DISENGAGEMENT, AND WILLINGNESS TO GO TO GENEVA SUGGEST EGYPTIAN READINESS TO CONCLUDE SEPARATE AGREEMENT WITH ISRAEL WITHOUT REGARD TO SYRIAN INTERESTS. SYRIANS SEEM TO BELIEVE THAT THEIR ARMED FORCE WERE NOT DEFEATED, LEARNED VALUABLE LESSONS IN OCTOBER, HAVE BEEN ADEQUATELY RESUPPLIED, AND NOW HAVE CAPABILITY TO INFLICT MORE DAMAGE IN ANOTHER ROUND. ISRAELI REFUS* TO COMPLY WITH CURRENT SYRIAN DEMANDS BEARING ON POSITION OF ISRAELIS IN OCCUPIED SYRIAN TERRITORIES HAS REINFORCED SYRIAN DISTRUST OF US WILLINGNES* TO "DELIVER" ISRA*L AT GENEVA AND *URTURED BELIEF THAT MILITARY OPTION MUST B *PURSUED UNTIL US HAS LEARNED THAT SYRIAN:DESIDERAT* CANNOT BE IGNORED.

3. ALTHOUGH WE HAVE NO REASON TO DOUBT SADAT'S GENUINE DESIRE FOR SUCCESS OF CONFERENCE, HE HAS SOME HAWKISH SENTIMENT TO CONTEND WITH IN HIS OWN ARMY, AND IN ANY CASE HE PROBABLY HAS VERY LITTLE LEVERAGE ON ASAD. IF MAJOR HOSTILITIES BREAK OUT ON GOLAN FRONT, WE SEE ALMOST NO POSSIBILITY THAT SUEZ FRONT COULD BE KEPT QUIET. EGYPT WOULD BE SORELY TEMPTED TO SEEK TO EXPLOIT ISRAELI PREOCCUPATION WITH GOLAN FRONT, AND, IN FACT, IF SADAT CONCLUDES THAT ASAD'S DECISION TO GO TO WAR IS IRREVERSIBLE, HE MAY WELL RELUCTANTLY DECIDE TO COORDYNATE AN EGYPTIAN ATTACK ON THE CANAL
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FRONT WITH SYRIAN ASSAULT. (CERTAIN EGYPTIAN AIR A DEFENSE, AIR, AND NAVAL MOVES DEC. 18 SUGGEST AT LEAST CONTINGENCY PLANNING FOR MILITARY ACTION.)

FOR ITS PART, ISRAEL WOULD BE LIKELY TO VIEW ARAB RESUMPTION OF FIGHTING AS OPPORTUNITY TO TRY TO FINISH THE JOB ON THE CANAL WHICH WAS INTERRUPTED BY THE CEASEFIRE. IN FACT, IF ISRAEL CONCLUDES THAT ARABS ARE ABOUT TO REOPEN FIGHTING, IT MAY WELL STRIKE FIRST ON EITHER OR BOTH FRONTS.

4. SYRIAN INSISTENCE ON PRE-GENEVA COMPLIANCE BY ISRAEL WITH SYRIAN DISENGAGEMENT DEMANDS MAY MEAN THAT SYRIA IS OPPOSED ON PRINCIPLE TO PARTICIPATION IN ANY PEACE CONFERENCE WHOSE OUTCOME IS NOT PRE-DETERMINED IN ARAB FAVOR. BAATIST DOGMA AND PALISTINENIAN ASSOCIATIONS MAY HAVE LED REGIME TO PLAY ITS

TRADITIONAL SPOILER'S ROLE AND TO TRY TO SCUTTLE THE
NEGOTIATING APPROACH. OBJECT WOULD BE TO FORCE
ISRAEL TO CONFERENCE TABLE, AFTER NEW BATTLES, UNDER
MUCH GREATER INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE TO COMMIT ITSELF IN
ADVANCE TO WITHDRAW FROM VIRTUALLY ALL THE OCCUPIED
TERRITORIES.

5. SOVIETS HAVE BEEN URGING SYRIA TO GO TO GENEVA,
PROBABLY ON ASSURANCE OF FIRM SOVIET SUPPORT FOR THEIR
OBJECTIVES. WE DOUBT, HOWEVER, THAT SOVIETS WOULD GO
FURTHER TO WARN SYRIANS BEFOREHAND THAT RESORT TO WAR
NOW WOULD ENTAIL LOSS OF SOVIET SUPPORT MILITARY
SUPPORT EVEN IN EVENT SYRIANS FACED MAJOR DEFEAT.
IF MOSCOW UNEXPECTEDLY TRIED SUCH A LINE, DAMASCUS
WOULD PROBABLY JUDGE THAT SOVIETS ARE TOO DEEPLY
COMMITTED TO ARABS TO CARRY OUT THREAT AND TO ABANDON
THEIR PROTEGES IN TIME OF NEED, WITH CONSEQUENT GREAT
DAMAGE TO SOVIET POSITION THROUGHOUT AREA.

6. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, RELATIVELY LITTLE OUTSIDE
LEVERAGE IS AVAILABLE TO DISSUADE SYRIAN LEADERSHIP
FROM ATTACK, IF THAT IS ITS INCLINATION, AS WE BELIEVE
IT VERY PROBABLY IS. INTERNALLY THE PRESSURES IN
DAMASCUS ALL POINT TO RESUMED HOSTILITIES AS THE BEST
OPTION TO ACHIEVE REGIME OBJECTIVES, BOTH AGAINST
ISRAEL AND DOMESTIC RIVALS. NUMEROUS REPORTS ATTEST
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TO THOROUGHGOING PREPARATIONS DURING LAST TEN DAYS
FOR NEW BATTLE, AND WE BELIEVE ASAD WOULD WANT TO ACT
BEFORE GENEVA CONFERENCE HAS ACTUALLY STARTED, SINCE
HIS ABILITY TO DISRUPT PROCEEDINGS IS PROBABLY NOW
AT MAXIMUM. PRETEXT FOR NEW FIGHTING WILL NOT BE
HARD TO MANUFACTURE, AND MOST OF ARAB WORLD IN ITS
PRESENT MOOD WILL ACCEPT IT AS TRUE *

7. MORE DETAILED CIA-DIA-INR REVIEW OF ARAB AND
ISRAELI MILITARY CAPABILITIES AND POSSIBLE BATTLEFIELD
SCENARIOS WILL BE SENT TOSEC DECEMBER 19. RUSH

SECRET

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PARIS

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JERUSALEM
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